

# The TeleDentists®

We Can See You Now™

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September 16, 2020

To : House Human Services Committee

Re: RFI

Dear Committee Members,

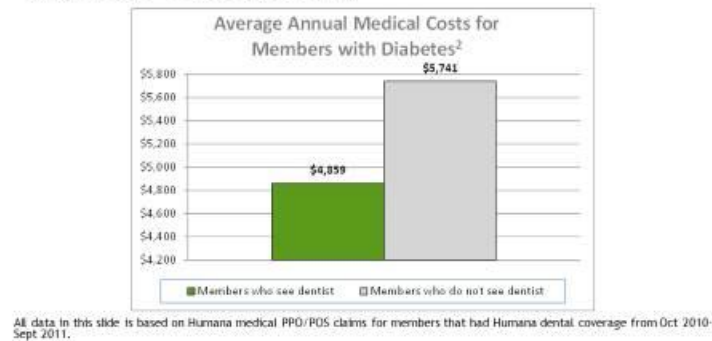
I'd like to address the topic of improving healthcare access as a proven way to reduce healthcare costs and improve overall health of Texas residents. Healthcare transformation is eminent because of Covid and beyond. This is a perfect storm for teledentistry. A perfect storm is defined as an unusual combination of events or things that produce unusually powerful results. The perfect storm for teledentistry is the combination of technology, pandemic, and market demand. The TeleDentists team has provided care for thousands of patients in 49 states before and during the first lockdown, keeping them out of Emergency Rooms and helping them with their oral healthcare problems. In every state except Texas, patients benefited from teledental consults in the safety of their own homes. The future of dentistry is here and now. As healthcare transformation must occur, the integration of oral health back into the healthcare system is now a reality with virtual dentists able to be everywhere a dentist should be. With the use of teledentistry, we can transform the healthcare industry by integrating oral health across the continuum of care. Healthcare providers can deliver better whole person care and see better patient outcomes. This has been shown to not only improve patient outcomes but reduces overall healthcare costs. And payors are reimbursing teledental consultations, except to their members in Texas. So, the Texas Dental Board is denying people with insurance a benefit for which they pay and need to utilize.

When \$3T was the national expenditure on healthcare before Covid, that is a crisis. The call to transform healthcare by integrating oral health has been ignored for 20 years. This is in spite of that fact that scientific studies confirm over and over again the correlation between periodontal disease and system disease such as arteriosclerosis, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, diseases of the respiratory system, kidney disease, osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis, premature and low birth weight babies, cancer and erectile dysfunction. Aetna and Columbia University research in 2006 on dental/medical integration (DMI) found that, compared to a statistically matched control group without the DMI program, DMI members receive 10% more preventive dental

care, and 42% less basic and major dental treatment. They also found that DMI members had an average of 17% lower medical costs.

## HOW IT ALL STARTED

What the data showed:



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Applied to the \$3T—that could mean a savings of \$520B in healthcare costs while improving patient health. Extrapolating that to the 29% of the population in Texas, that would save roughly \$150.8B Texas dollars. **Now** is the perfect time to listen the advice of the surgeon general and health care organizations supporting that effort for years.

2000 – US SURGEON GENERAL SAID ORAL HEALTH MUST BE A PART OF HEALTHCARE

2010 – INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE—WE MUST INTEGRATE ORAL HEALTH INTO PRIMARY CARE

2014 – HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICE ADMINISTRATION (HRSA)-ORAL HEALTH MUST BE A PART OF HEALTHCARE

2015 – AMERICAN ACADEMY OF FAMILY PRACTICE AND THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS SUPPORTS ORAL HEALTH AS PART OF PRIMARY CARE.

This is 2020 and a recent study cited showed only 7% of children had an oral health interaction with their primary care providers.\* It is estimated that 180M people will not even see a dentist this year, so poor oral health will be making more of an impact on total health. Patients see their primary care doctors more frequently than their dentist. Recommending a teledental consultation during routine care can connect the patient to an oral healthcare provider and help them access care. And patients are ready for teledentistry.

Where can teledentistry be done? Anywhere there is a mobile device, computer or laptop, a virtual dental consultation can take place on a HIPAA Secured platform. Teledentistry can improve access to an oral health specialist anywhere people go to receive healthcare: telehealth companies, long term care facilities, FQHC, hospitals, walk-in retail clinics, urgent care facilities, student health centers and from the comfort of their own home.

Since Covid, virtual visits are now part of reducing viral exposures in the dental office. Virtual visits can provide the pre-covid screening, triaging emergencies and palliating non-emergencies to save valuable chair time and PPEs. With all the PPE requirements to treat patients, virtual visits will be the most personal contact patients will have with their dental team. The opportunity to “see” the dentist and staff free from masks, shields and protective gear will allow the interpersonal relationship to be established. The treatment of patients who receive services via teledentistry must be properly documented and should include providing the patient with a summary of services. Dentists who deliver services using teledentistry must establish protocols for appropriate referrals when necessary. Even though HIPAA compliance was relaxed during the start of Covid, providing privacy is important and using a HIPAA compliant consultation will be required again.

Estimated that 180M people in the USA will not visit a dentist office this year. Again, that would be approximately 52M Texans. But if the Texas Dental Board will approve teledentistry—Texas residents can have access to an oral health care professional at the tip of their fingers. Virtual Technology empowers patients to take control of their dental health by overcoming their biggest issue. Going to the dentist! A virtual consultation by a licensed dentist is a logical first step for re-introducing patients to the importance of good dental health by having a quality, professional dental consultation all from the comfort and convenience of their desktop or mobile device. If a follow-up visit is needed, the patient can be appointed to a dental office via some platforms. Telehealth is the fastest growing setting for alternative care. Better than urgent care clinics, retail centers, and ambulatory surgical centers. It is past time to approve teledentistry in Texas. Healthcare even in Texas should have common goals to improve patient outcomes and reduce healthcare costs by improving oral health. TELEHEALTH USE IS UP 53% and growing faster than any other place of care. Teledentistry is the newest specialty. Expanding the reach of healthcare into oral health is a big advantage to patients producing a powerful result—optimizing health while reducing healthcare costs. Win-win for all concerned.

Respectfully,

Maria Kunstadter, DDS

President and Co-Founder

The TeleDentists, LLC

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